

# Friends of French Prairie

Friends of French Prairie  
is an Oregon non-profit corporation

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January 27, 2018

President Peter Courtney, Speaker Tina Kotek, House Transportation Chair Susan McLain

Vice Chairs: Mark Meek & Richard Vial

Members: Reps. Daniel Bonham, Paul Evans, Ronald Noble, Andrea Salinas, Carl Wilson,  
Brad Witt (cc: Sen. Lee Beyer)

Dear Speaker Kotek, Senate President Courtney, and Chair McLain:

Because we strongly believe that Government transparency and citizen input as part of an open process are key components of our government in Oregon, we are writing to convey our concerns regarding HB 4092 which seeks to allow for an expansion of the Aurora State Airport. The bill as proposed is specific to Aurora Airport (over 350 based aircraft) and would allow for the expansion of the airport (definition of “runway area” includes runway, taxiway, access road and ag land for safety zone) by circumventing statewide land use laws.

Specifically, HB 4092 would exempt local governments from being subject to statewide planning goals for the purpose of expanding the airport. Bypassing Oregon's land use laws unfairly cuts the public out of the process and sidesteps state requirements to consider impacts on farmland, surface transportation, and urban services. Having been actively involved in the so-called “public process” concerning the construction of an air traffic control tower and the process for a new master plan (2013 Aurora Airport Master Plan) we can speak from experience about the import of a real and transparent public process when something of this magnitude is being undertaken!

For this reason, we request your assistance in not assigning the bill to a committee so that a more deliberate and open process can be established on the future of the airport. It is not too

late to rectify the “broken public process” that has characterized the last seven years of airport development at Aurora! Additionally, consideration of the measure during a 35-day legislative session severely limits opportunity for public input.

The approach taken in this bill is not in the best interest of residents of either Marion or Clackamas Counties, nor specifically residents of Charbonneau and Wilsonville, nor the City of Aurora. And, the precedent setting nature of this bill makes it not in the best interest of Oregonians. The proposal also fails to allow for a comprehensive assessment on the Aurora Airport's future.

The changes being sought through this legislation are significant, and appropriate time should be given to comprehensively study the economic benefits of the airport while allowing for a robust public process.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Benjamin D Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light blue rectangular background.

Benjamin D Williams

Friends of French Prairie

## THE BROKEN PUBLIC PROCESS AT THE AURORA AIRPORT

In spite of the appearance of “public process”, the process itself has been suspect, manipulated or operated behind closed doors from the start. In chronological order:

1. Marion County and Oregon Dept. of Aviation created an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that was presented and approved at a Commissioner’s Management meeting on June 7, 2010, not a public hearing, that allowed the application for and receipt of Connect Oregon III funds to pay for the air traffic control tower.
2. The IGA between Marion County and Oregon Dept. of Aviation included an “Impact Area Map” that specifically excluded Clackamas County and City of Wilsonville, the municipalities with the most population directly impacted by aviation at the Aurora Airport, contravening the intent of the 1976 Master Plan which said the State “should continue to work closely with Marion and Clackamas Counties to develop compatible land use planning” and “develop zoning changes on or near the airport.”.
3. The “Preferred Alternative” recommendation of WH Pacific and Oregon Dept. of Aviation to the Oregon Aviation Board on March 10, 2011, to not lengthening the runway at Aurora Airport due to adverse impact on EFU land was overturned at the direction of Mark Gardiner, Chair of the Oregon Aviation Board, who directed ODA to put forward lengthening options. Of note, the Preferred Alternative recommendation made at the OAB meeting did not appear in the minutes of the meeting!. Ultimately, the lengthening option accepted and approved by the FAA was a 1,000 foot expansion to the south.
4. The public meetings held during the Aurora Airport Master Plan update largely ignored input in opposition to airport expansion and even included re-surveying aircraft owners re: based aircraft and constrained operations to arrive at the data set desired by ODA and the Aviation Board—culminating in the threatened resignation of concerned citizens included in the Public Advisory Committee. This in contrast to the 1976 Master Plan that stated the “State should work closely with the airport users, local governments and citizens. A flexible attitude and approach to the planning process should be maintained.”
5. The air traffic control tower was constructed with no environmental assessment, in spite of the 1976 Master Plan requirement that construction of “major capital improvements at the airport will require a full disclosure of environmental effects expected to result. This will be disclosed in an Environmental Impact Statement as required under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.”.
6. In an exercise in “carve out” or “super siting,” during the 2017 Legislative session

SB534 (the “pottys for pilots bill”) was passed allowing the provision of municipal services to airports at Madras and Aurora without annexation by the city providing those services, contravening Oregon land use laws.

7. In the 2018 session. HB4092 is yet another “carve out” or “super siting” bill that would allow State airports with over 350 based aircraft (only Aurora Airport qualifies) to expand a “runway area” onto EFU land. “Runway area” is defined as meaning “a runway, taxiway, access road, safety area or runway protection zone” and additionally includes “(3) A state airport runway area extension under this section may include new or expanded facilities for aviation-related equipment that support runway areas.” Additionally, the Aurora Airport “shall not be deemed to require an exception to any statewide planning goal or to require a demonstration of compliance with any statewide planning goal.” This language would bypass the land use exception process and public hearings that assess impact in order to allow outright airport expansion onto EFU land.

## **Summary**

The majority of the impacted public was not included, municipalities that should have been involved were excluded, adequate infrastructure (transportation, water, sewer, surface roads, etc.) does not exist to support the contemplated expansion of the airport, and the argument for the current runway expansion is based on “constrained operations” and the need to accommodate the largest corporate jets. However, only 22 jets are based at Aurora Airport, and constrained operations are limited to the very few hot days of summer that limit total load on board.

The lengthening of the Aurora Airport runway benefits only a few who are developing hanger space or sell jet fuel. It is a very expensive use of State and Federal tax dollars and challenges the quality of life for those around the airport. Of note, a 6,000 foot runway will be longer than the main runway at John Wayne Airport in Orange County, CA at 5,701 feet.

An alternative, Salem Airport only 22 air miles to the south, exists for the jet aircraft who choose to top off their tanks on hot days. Only jets and turboprop aircraft are affected, and only on hot days. Why go to millions of dollars of public expense to lengthen a runway when so few benefit and an alternative is so close?

What is needed here is an intergovernmental Task Force to consider all aspects of Aurora Airport Infrastructure. Unlike the failed Aurora Airport IGA, which created a boundary along Arndt Road, the County line which is the north fence of the runway, Wilsonville and Clackamas County should be included. So long as Aurora Airport expansion issues: runway, sewer and water, controlled airspace etc. is being considered, there will be opposition when close by impacted stakeholders are excluded.